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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIFR](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: TIBETAN MONKS DEFIANT AT LABRANG MONASTERY,  
"PLEASE LEAVE" IS NEW TOURISM SLOGAN IN XIAHE, GANSU

REF: A. BEIJING 3966  
[1](#)B. BEIJING 2682  
[1](#)C. BEIJING 2679  
[1](#)D. BEIJING 1513

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor  
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) Ethnic Tibetans in Xiahe (Sangchu), Gansu Province, told EmbOffs September 25 that authorities there continue to be on "high alert" against renewed unrest. Though, unlike in March, Xiahe is now readily accessible by car, foreigners are still not allowed to stay overnight. Han Chinese tourists were barred from Xiahe during the Olympics for fear they might become targets of violence, according to one source. Two Tibetans explained that officials are limiting the number of times locals can pray at the Labrang Monastery, which is fueling resentment. Soon after arriving in Xiahe, a Public Security Bureau (PSB) officer ordered EmbOffs to leave town, though he did permit a quick tour of Labrang. The policeman, an ethnic Tibetan and former monk, provided EmbOffs a window into tensions within Xiahe's Tibetan community. Many Tibetans clearly ostracize the policeman because of his PSB affiliation, though he took pains to downplay his authority and portray himself as a "little guy" who is "just doing his job." Originally intent on escorting EmbOffs on the tour of Labrang, EmbOffs' PSB minder was forced to wait outside when monks strenuously objected to his presence inside the monastery. End Summary.

"UNOFFICIAL" TRAVEL TO TIBETAN AREAS

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[1](#)2. (C) This cable provides expanded detail to ref A report on EmbOffs' unofficial visit to various Tibetan areas in Qinghai and Gansu Provinces September 21-26. Specifically, this report covers the September 25 visit to Xiahe (Sangchu) in Gansu Province and the nearby Labrang Monastery. Since the outbreak of widespread unrest in Tibetan regions of China in March, Xiahe and Labrang have been the site of several large-scale demonstrations and the arrest of an unknown number of monks and lay Tibetans.

XIAHE NOT QUITE OPEN TO FOREIGNERS

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[1](#)3. (C) Prior to arrival in Xiahe, EmbOffs received conflicting reports on whether the town had reopened to foreigners. One taxi driver in the neighboring Tibetan city of Hezuo refused to take EmbOffs on the grounds that Xiahe remained "closed." A second driver, however, was willing to make the trip and claimed that he had recently taken other foreigners to the town. Upon leaving Hezuo, EmbOffs' driver stopped at a PSB checkpoint to apply for a permit to make the drive. The PSB officer recorded EmbOffs passport information but made no indication that foreigners were forbidden from

traveling to Xiahe. (Note: This was in contrast to March (ref D), when the Gansu Public Security Bureau established roadblocks on major highways to prevent foreigners, especially journalists, from reaching Xiahe.) Bus companies, however, apparently are still under orders not to sell foreigners bus tickets. A British tourist EmbOffs encountered September 26 in Tongren (Rebgong), Qinghai Province, reported that days earlier he was refused a ticket to Xiahe at a bus station in Lanzhou, Gansu's capital.

XIAHE SECURITY HIGH, BUT FEWER TROOPS THAN IN JULY  
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¶4. (C) At the entrance to Xiahe, EmbOffs passed a People's Armed Police (PAP) checkpoint manned by PAP troops armed with assault rifles and standing behind sandbag barriers. (Note: EmbOffs saw similar PAP checkpoints in other Tibetan towns in Gansu the week of September 22.) Inside Xiahe, EmbOffs occasionally saw PAP soldiers walking in twos or threes. This was in contrast to July 2008, when PolOffs saw 40-troop PAP columns regularly marching along Xiahe's main thoroughfare (ref C). Despite the reduced show of force by security forces, EmbOffs were spotted and reported to the local PSB within minutes of arrival (see below), likely indicating that plain-clothes security personnel were patrolling the streets. Several locals said authorities continue to be "concerned" about potential unrest. According to Cairang (protect), a Xiahe taxi driver, during the August 8-24 Olympic Games, Han Chinese tourists were barred from Xiahe for fear they would become targets of violence by Tibetans.

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RESTRICTIONS ON MONASTERY VISITS ANGER TIBETANS  
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¶5. (S) Soon after arriving in Xiahe, EmbOffs spoke with restaurant owner Namgal Dolma (strictly protect). Namgal, whose establishment caters both to foreign tourists and local Tibetans, said her business has been "devastated" by the March unrest and subsequent crackdown. She claimed EmbOffs were her first foreign customers since March. Other tourist restaurants in Xiahe simply closed down, she said. Namgal asserted that Xiahe continues to experience protests and that she personally participated in several demonstrations. She cited continuing restrictions on Tibetans' access to Labrang Monastery as fueling their anger. Authorities keep a register of local visitors to Labrang, she claimed, and do not allow Tibetans to pray at the monastery daily. Police do not allow Tibetans to gather at Labrang for festivals. Namgal reported that "many" Tibetans in Xiahe have been arrested since March, with police frequently beating detainees. Later, EmbOffs spoke briefly with a Tibetan named Shamba (strictly protect) who works at a tourist guesthouse in Xiahe. "I hate the government," he said, "but my whole family is here, so I stay." Like Namgal, Shamba described restrictions and ID checks for Tibetans wishing to pray at Labrang.

JINBA: THE CONFLICTED TIBETAN COP  
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¶6. (S) Approximately 40 minutes after arriving in Xiahe, EmbOffs were approached at their table in Namgal's restaurant by Jinba (protect), an officer with the Xiahe Public Security Bureau's (PSB) foreign affairs division. Jinba, an ethnic Tibetan in his early forties who speaks fluent English, apologetically told EmbOffs that they had to leave Xiahe. Jinba then took EmbOffs' passports to be photocopied at the nearby PSB station. Once Jinba left the restaurant, Namgal re-approached EmbOffs and explained that Jinba "is Tibetan but he works for the police." "His job," she added with obvious contempt, "is to keep foreigners out."

¶7. (C) After returning, Jinba once again told EmbOffs they

had to leave and offered to arrange a car to take them to Tongren (Rebgong), Qinghai Province (a three-hour drive to the northwest). EmbOffs requested first to be allowed a brief tour of Labrang Monastery. After consulting with his superiors by phone, Jinba agreed on condition that he escort EmbOffs at all times. During the walk to Labrang, Jinba again apologized, saying he was "just doing his job" and that he was a "little guy." The ban on foreigners is a policy of higher officials, he said, making clear his personal disagreement. With EmbOffs still in tow, Jinba spotted an Italian tourist taking photos along the town's main road. "I thought I told you to leave yesterday," Jinba scolded the tourist, saying, "I'm really disappointed with you." (Note: The Italian, a wheelchair-bound paraplegic on a solo driving tour across Europe and Asia, told EmbOffs he had ignored Jinba's orders to leave and had spent the previous night sleeping in his vehicle.)

¶8. (C) Though reluctant to talk about recent demonstrations, Jinba willingly discussed his personal story. A native of Xiahe, Jinba described himself as a devout Buddhist who, in his youth, spent two years as a novice monk in Labrang. Jinba claimed that he traveled to India and, like many Tibetan refugees, met the Dalai Lama. Later, Jinba worked as a tour guide for China International Travel Service (CITS) before taking an exam six years ago to join the PSB. In explaining his journey from monk to police officer, Jinba implied that he entered law enforcement mainly for the paycheck. Jinba also discussed Labrang's history and said he was eager for the chance to show two American diplomats one of Tibetan Buddhism's great monasteries.

"HE'S NOT COMING IN HERE"

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¶9. (C) At Labrang, EmbOffs purchased entrance tickets and prepared to join a tour with a group of five Chinese tourists. Just as the tour began, however, two monks began arguing with Jinba in Tibetan. Somewhat embarrassed, Jinba explained to EmbOffs that "the monks don't like me because I am a policeman and they won't let me in." EmbOffs thus could not see the monastery and would need to refund their tickets, Jinba said. As EmbOffs were preparing to leave, an English-speaking monk offered to take EmbOffs on a tour and reluctantly agreed to Jinba's demand that Jinba act as an escort. After entering the monastery, however, Jinba and EmbOffs' new tour guide continued to quarrel heatedly. Jinba eventually relented and told EmbOffs he would wait at Labrang's entrance while EmbOffs participated in the tour.

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As Jinba walked away, the monk explained that Jinba is "unwelcome" at Labrang and that Jinba's demand to escort tourists was "unacceptable." The monk said he recently led a tour for a group of Swedish tourists without interference from the PSB. Visibly angry, the monk took a moment to regain his composure before continuing the tour.

¶10. (C) During the tour, the monk (who appeared to be in his early twenties) alluded to recent unrest and made clear that he could not speak freely with EmbOffs. (Note: The security presence at Labrang was noticeable though not overwhelming. About six PSB and PAP vehicles were parked outside the monastery's main entrance. Inside Labrang, EmbOffs observed several uniformed People's Liberation Army officers apparently touring the monastery.) In two of Labrang's temples, EmbOffs observed large photos of Gyaincain Norbu, the boy designated by the Chinese Government as the 11th Panchen Lama but who is rejected by the majority of Tibetan Buddhists. In one location, equal-sized photos of the 9th, 10th, and "11th" Panchens were placed side by side. Our tour guide half-heartedly gestured to the photo of Gyaincain Norbu and identified him as the "11th Panchen Lama."

¶11. (C) Following the tour, Jinba collected EmbOffs at the entrance. Unusual for a PSB official in China, he provided

EmbOffs with his cellular phone number and personal e-mail address and stressed that EmbOffs are welcome to return to Xiahe when the situation has "stabilized." Having bid Jinba farewell, EmbOffs departed as agreed for Tongren.

COMMENT

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¶12. (C) There appears to be a concerted campaign underway at Labrang, probably implemented by the local Religious Affairs Bureau, to promote Gyaincain Norbu as the "true" Panchen Lama. During a July visit to Labrang (refs B and C), a monk invited PolOff into his private quarters and then insisted on showing PolOff a Government-published photo album of the official Panchen. This encounter seemed like a contrived attempt to convince a foreigner of the Labrang monks' devotion to Gyaincain Norbu. Of nine monasteries visited in Qinghai and Gansu between February and September, Labrang is the only one where PolOff has seen photos of the Government-recognized Panchen.

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